

On the

UPGRADE

The right packaging — with on-trend materials, functional features and compelling design elements — can help retailers attract attention to premium private brand non-food products ■ **By Kathie Canning**

The past decade or so has brought with it a major wave of premium private brand food and beverage products. Moreover, the design and structure of the packaging for such products has improved with each passing year.

Although many retailers also have introduced a number of premium non-food products, albeit a smaller collection, the packaging for such items doesn't always get the attention it deserves. As they develop and rework packaging here, retailers would be wise to consider something that global market research firm Mintel relays in its "Global

Packaging Trends 2017" report: "Good packaging protects your product. Great packaging protects your brand."

Materials matter

A winning package for premium non-food products incorporates a variety of trends that mesh with today's consumer wants and needs. And materials-related trends should be a big part of the consideration set.

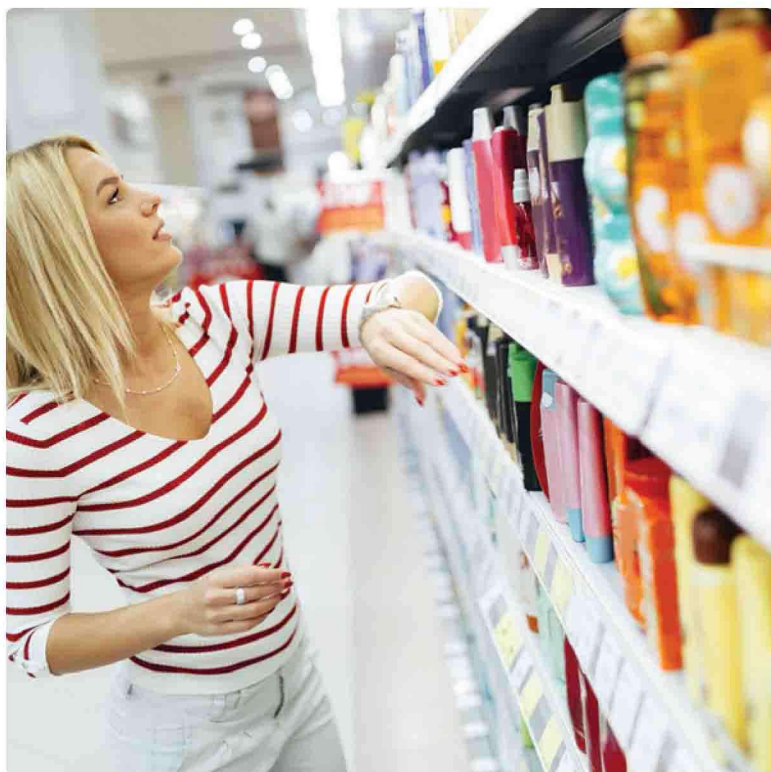
For premium personal care items, flexible packaging is gaining in popularity, says Rebecca Casey, senior director of marketing for TC Transcontinental Packaging in Vaughan, Ontario.

"Flexible packaging, with its barrier technology, laminates and printing expertise, has helped brand owners capitalize on getting consumers to notice their package and enjoy how the packaging protects the product," she notes. "For example, consumers are purchasing their favorite canister wipes in three-, four- and six-packs, and the shift has moved from corrugated sleeves with plain film overwrap and labels to printed shrink film."

The printed film helps reduce over-packaging and enhances sustainability, Casey explains.

Outside of the personal care space — in cleaning and laundry care, for example — bottles still account for the majority of packaging, notes Kris Kenyon Jackson, who works in category solutions for Stamford, Conn.-based Daymon. The perception among many consumers is that bottled products are less expensive.

"However, more flexible materials are gaining traction in new product development with the popularity of standup pouches," she says. "Malleable materials solve the issue of space, a problem that 25 percent of consumers face since they cannot find a place to store their items.



Regardless of practicality, larger sizes are still seen as valuable.”

Casey points to an ongoing trend in this segment involving downgauging in flexible packaging, which results in significant reductions in packaging and transportation costs, as well as less waste entering landfills.

“Another growing trend to watch is an increase in high-performance polyolefin films for demanding applications and environments that require a higher shrink performance for odd-shaped products while keeping all print elements in place,” she says.

Overall, there’s also a push toward transparency, Casey adds.

“Consumers don’t want to see a product that is hidden by shrink sleeves, corrugate and labels,” she says. “They want to see the shape of the product, the size, and learn more about the product.”

Form doesn’t trump function

Packaging for premium non-food products also needs to be created with consumer usage in mind. The packaging should consider consumers’ busy lifestyles — meaning it should be easy to open, easy to reclose and easy to dispose of, Casey stresses.

Retailers also need to understand that what consumers want, in terms of packaging functionality, varies by generation.

“Millennials are always looking for customization and how it relates directly to them,” says Millie Nuno, director of global marketing for ProAmpac in Cincinnati. “Baby boomers want easy to open and easy to reclose.”

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Great packaging
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— Mintel

Beyond these basics, retailers might want to consider tubing or inverted bottles, as well as premeasured dosing. After all, consumers “want the most bang for their buck,” Jackson suggests, especially when it comes to premium non-food items.

“Shoppers look for functionality that includes tubing or inverted bottles so that they can use all of the product they purchased,” she explains. “And

Packaging Innovation

36 percent of consumers agree that more product is used when a bottle is inverted or turned upside down. Clorox promotes several products that adhere to this need under the Smart Tube line.”

Pod, tablets or caps that deliver premeasured dosing also help to eliminate waste. Jackson points to the Libman Freedom multi-surface cleaner as an example of a product offering a dosing cap.



Pods that deliver premeasured dosing can eliminate waste.

Convenience-minded features such as scrubbers built into a cap also add value in consumers’ eyes, she says, as do child-resistant caps and zippers.

But retailers will want to be sure to publicize any value-added packaging features on the secondary packaging, Casey says.

“If a handle is added, call it out — ‘New handle to make your life easier,’” she says. “Consumers will understand once they use the product, but why not use the packaging itself to inform them upfront and help entice them to purchase the product?”

Today’s packaging functionality enhancements also go beyond the physical package. Patrick Mallek, owner of Boulder, Colo.-based Mighty Fudge Studios, calls digital integration “the future of functional packaging.” He believes mobile technologies such as augmented reality (AR) open up almost unlimited opportunities for couponing, loyalty and other functions out of reach for traditional packaging.

“AR can unlock a dozen or more relevant features right in the aisle from a single PDP scan — shopping list, product info, comparisons, instant coupons,

Sustainability counts, too

The right packaging — with on-trend materials, functional features and compelling design elements — can be critical to sales of premium private brand non-food products. But a fourth element — packaging sustainability — also is becoming a more important factor in consumer purchase decisions.

Rebecca Casey, senior director of marketing for Vaughn, Ontario-based TC Transcontinental Packaging, points out that personal care items traditionally have been overwrapped in either hard plastic or boxes. Today's eco-minded consumers aren't too keen about all of that dead space.

"One of the tenets of the sustainability movement is reducing the amount of materials used in packaging and shrinking the overall environmental footprint of that package," she says.

Although she contends that sustainability is not yet a driver for premium non-food purchases, Kris Kenyon Jackson, who works in category solutions for Stamford, Conn.-based Daymon, says ingredient transparency is.

"There are certain brands that have served this need well, like Tide PurClean, Mr. Meyers and Method, which all have clear bottles displaying the product so consumers feel the brand is being transparent about what's inside," she says.

Jackson does note that younger adults — aged 18 to 34 — are most interested in environmental and health claims and natural ingredients.

"They look for labeling programs with a focus on health, safety and the environment such as EPA's Safer Choice program, the SmartLabel program and the How2Recycle program, among others," she says.

Meanwhile, the importance of packaging sustainability is sure to grow in the years to come, suggests Patrick Mallek, owner of Boulder, Colo.-based Mighty Fudge Studios.

"Less packaging is more to the consumer, and with less real estate, marketers will have to get creative to deliver all the messaging and information needed," he stresses. "We've recently seen innovative things like laser-printed branding on fruit and ... mobile technologies like augmented reality, which can deliver important nutritional and dietary information by scanning a label as small as a nickel."



customer reviews and more," he says. "These innovative technologies appeal strongly to younger demographics, who, if they don't already, will come to expect this convenience both in-store and at home."

Don't discount design

Retailers also will want to dress up their premium non-food items with a design that's on-trend and engaging. Jackson points to two elements wielding an influence on design here: modernity and practicality.



Color, too, is currently an important element when it comes to packaging design in this space.

"More brand owners are using color to strengthen their brand and to send strong messaging," Casey says.

But a brand often encompasses many flavors, scents or sizes, so keeping the consistency across the board can be a challenge, she adds.

"Recently, we had a customer challenge us to not only match their rotogravure quality, but to execute running multiple SKUs per press run in expanded gamut," Casey notes. "This required many color builds and extremely tight register control."

The customer was very happy with the results, she reports, and the brand was elevated across the product line.

Independent of trends, it's critical that the package design represents the product itself.

"Forty percent of consumers judge product quality by packaging aesthetics," Jackson maintains. "Packaging should also include labels that display clear and concise usage information." **SB**

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